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A Life of Public Service

BY LEAH T. BROWN



Santa Fe county clerk Valerie Espinoza walks into her office, cheeks flushed enough to match her deep red suit, and asks for an ibuprofen to help calm her

nerves. Today, Governor Bill Richardson is coming to her office to hold a press-conference and sign the Paper Ballot Bill, making New Mexico an official paper ballot state.

Valerie grew up in Española and was raised by her grandmother, a life long educator. From an early age, Valerie's family instilled in her a sense of community pride and the value of a quality education. As a young woman, Valerie became so invested in local activism that she wound up putting off pursuing a college degree in order to focus on family and career.

Some 20 years after graduating high school, Valerie received her bachelors in organizational psychology through CSF's Evening & Weekend Degree Program in 1997. She says she's living proof to working adults that you can succeed.

"Never hesitate and never doubt yourself," she says, "otherwise you might not reach your potential."

As the county clerk, Valerie doesn't hesitate when a problem comes her way. Her door is always open to the public and she's always ready to take on city hall or the state legislature. She explains that the Paper Ballot Bill will transition New Mexico into an all-paper ballot-voting system: all polling machines will be required to provide a hand-marked paper copy of each vote as a record to ensure accuracy to the voters. The bill makes New Mexico a leader in progressive voting practices across the country.

Valerie's pride in participating in this historic event is intoxicating. She can't wipe the grin off her face, even when she explains how daunted she is to speak in front of state and national media. She is thrilled to have helped improve her community and her state.

During her first term in office, Valerie has succeeded in getting all of Santa Fe's polling locations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and helping to get the Paper Ballot Bill passed. In the future she hopes to help continue improving the quality of people's lives and sense of community pride by staying in Santa Fe and continuing to run for public office. She now has a career that truly inspires her and embodies her vision for the future of Santa Fe.

"Before," she says, "I was a nine-to-fiver. But now, in this position, it doesn't bother me to stay after nine or ten o'clock — and it is so fulfilling."

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